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Dystopia and Individualism

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DYSTOPIA AND INDIVIDUALISM

by

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This project compared popular fiction and scripture to discover a theological issue. Four young adult novels were selected: *Divergent*, *The Giver*, *The Hunger Games*, and *Feed*. To discover the theological issue, the novels were read with adapted methodology from Frank Rogers *Finding God in the graffiti : empowering teenagers through stories*. The method is the societal empowerment approach to narrative pedagogy.¹ I approached a solution in light of Genesis 3:7-10. All scripture in the thesis will be NRSV.

⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.⁸ They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' ¹⁰He said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.'

There are three assumptions throughout my comparisons of the literature to this text. First, there is genuine free will. God permits human's to make decisions, even to the point they can turn away from God. Second, God is immanent in creation despite the absence of God in the dystopian novels. Third, God created humans to be aware of when there is a separation from God.

¹ Frank Rogers, *Finding God in the graffiti: empowering teenagers through stories*, Youth ministry alternatives (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2011). I've adapted the methodology from chapter 6.

Thesis

In light of the dystopian novels, sin is individualism, which is the separation from God, the earth, and others. The problem of individualism has an inverse relationship to community. As society moves toward individualism in the novels, the communities fall apart. Individualism is a problem because it breaks down community as God intended.

Thus the thesis is that God restores community in Genesis 3:9 through communication: “Where are you?” In other words individualism is the tool by which dystopian societies prevent communication. The question is full of grace and invitation, in contrast to the tools of judgment and control in dystopian societies. The question shatters the closed reality of Adam and Eve through communication, and invites a new openness to the past, present, and future.

Context

Before moving into the first chapter, I will define dystopia and provide a novel summary. The dystopian genre presents a horrible world in which no reader wants to live. However, aspects of the novel may be true for the reader. Typically, the world is in the near future, where a new society has arisen out of the ashes of conflict. Often, a new way to organize society appears idyllic at the beginning of the narrative. It then becomes clear that a societal structure limits an aspect of human freedom, which turns the story into a nightmare. Like prophetic literature, a dystopian novel may portray what our society would look like if it continues as it is without any change (e.g. George Orwell’s *1984*). The novels typically end in societal collapse.

The Hunger Games trilogy by Suzanne Collins (*The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009), *Mockingjay* (2012)) follows protagonist Katniss Everdeen from

her hometown of District Twelve. There are twelve districts total, under the totalitarian rule of President Snow who lives in the capitol Panem. Panem maintains peace and prosperity through a tribute system called The Hunger Games. Each year, two people, a boy and a girl, from each district are selected from a lottery to enter into the televised games. Each Hunger Game has one goal: stay alive. Twenty-four tributes enter the arena and only one leaves the victor. The rest die in combat. The citizens of Panem treat the competition like reality TV, with the enthusiasm of sports fans who support a favorite person/team. There are important people that assist Katniss in the trilogy. Haymitch is a past winner from District Twelve, who spends his time drunk, but provides counsel to District Twelve tributes, along with securing sponsorship for Katniss. Gale is Katniss' childhood friend who spends time with her in the woods illegally hunting food for their families. A love competition arises between Gale and the other male protagonist, Peeta, throughout the books.

The first book, *The Hunger Games* (2008), has Katniss Everdeen sacrifice herself in place of her sister Prim who is selected for The Hunger Games at the outset of the novel. Katniss and a boy Peeta travel to the capitol along with the other twenty-two tributes. Katniss notices the economic stratification, because she notices a material abundance while people in her district starve. A series of events leads up to The Hunger Games—TV interviews, fight and survival training, cosmetic makeover, sponsorship and rankings. The goal of rankings is to impress the committee of the games with a talent or skill—anything that will help them win. A ranking is assigned which is important if a tribute is to gain sponsorship. Katniss is skillful with a bow and arrow, and Peeta who is a baker, can lift a lot of weight. Sponsorship means that during the games a silver

parachute could fall in front of a tribute carrying vital goods for survival. This means it becomes a popularity contest for the tributes to impress the citizens of Panem during interviews, rankings, and every moment the camera is on them. Katniss eventually wins due to her survival skills acquired before The Hunger Games from illegally hunting outside her home town of District Twelve to keep her family alive. However, Katniss complicates the game: Katniss and Peeta remain alive until the end, at which point they must battle each other in order for a single victor to walk away; but, she threatens to kill herself with poisonous berries co-opting Peeta who agrees to swallow them at the same time she does. The game master stops them before it happens, then declaring two victors to the amazement of a televised audience because it is an unprecedented event. The act of rebellion places Katniss in the all-seeing eye of President Snow who uses The Hunger Games to keep the districts obedient to his totalitarian rule. She has defied the rule of President Snow, which eventually snowballs with the help of the other districts into the collapse of his regime at the end of book three.

Book two, *Catching Fire* (2009), has a 75th edition of the games, which means previous winners are re-entered into the games, while the goal remains the same. A plot to overthrow the government was planned without Katniss knowing, to the effect that the 75th games end abruptly with the stadium exploding. Katniss and other contestants are airlifted to District Thirteen (previously thought to have been destroyed), the headquarters of the rebellion. Peeta is captured by the capitol and District Twelve is bombed to the ground.

In book three, *Mockingjay* (2012), President Coin of District Thirteen uses Katniss in propaganda films against the capitol keeping her out of the battle for Panem.

Eventually, after a filming ends, Katniss and her team fight through the capitol of Panem. Katniss watches the death of her sister in front of President Snow's mansion. She learns President Coin killed her sister to gain her allegiance. At the execution of President Snow, at which Katniss was selected to perform the execution, she instead turns her bow and arrow on President Coin, killing her and starting a riot in which President Snow is also killed. Katniss is acquitted due to mental instability, and returns to District Twelve to marry Peeta and start a new life.

Divergent (2011), by Veronica Roth, portrays a future society that has reorganized around virtue-clans: Dauntless, Abnegation, Erudite, Amity, and Candor. Everyone chooses a virtue in which to belong at the age of sixteen at the Choosing Ceremony. Prior to this ceremony, every teenager takes an aptitude test delivering a single result to assist in the choosing of one of the five faction virtues. However, on a rare occasion the test taker receives a Divergent status due to their tendency for multiple virtues. The virtue the teenager selects determines the person's life in relationship to the larger community, forever.

Beatrice, the protagonist, grows up in Abnegation. She fits multiple factions, thus receiving the label Divergent. However, the test administrator warns her to keep the result secret and protects Beatrice by manually changing her result in the record books to Abnegation. At the Choosing Ceremony, she chooses Dauntless becoming a rare faction transfer, and labeled as a traitor by her birth faction. Beatrice changes her name to Tris as she enters the Dauntless headquarters for initiation. Twenty initiates begin, and only ten will be offered positions in the faction. The losers become factionless.

“Because they failed to complete initiation into whatever faction they chose, they live in poverty, doing the work no one else wants to do. They are janitors and construction workers and garbage collectors; they make fabric and operate trains and drive buses. In return for their work they get food and clothing, but, as my mother says, not enough of either.”²

Thus, the impetus for success is the fear of poverty. During initiation, Divergent becomes Beatrice’s inner label, causing an inner tension because she can manipulate computer simulations leading to great success. If the government learns that she can manipulate the tests, she might be removed and possibly killed. She realizes why her divergent status scares the government. The virtue categories help the government manage peace and maintain totalitarian control. Tris succeeds in initiation, ranking number one (also like Katniss in the first *Hunger Games* book). The evil Erudite leader, Jeanine, developed the computer simulations, and Jeanine had been plotting to overthrow the government via her computer simulations. Since Dauntless provides the bravery (soldiers) for the city, she turns Dauntless into robots with a flip of a switch, because they had been injected with a serum before entering the computer simulations during initiation. Tris and her teacher, Four, develop a love and learn they share the Divergent label. While everyone turns into mind controlled robots, they remain awake and aware of the situation. They save the day, destroying the computer servers running the software by which Jeanine controls the soldiers. Tris and Four flee the city with other survivors for the Amity compound outside the city gates. The book ends with no clear resolution to the cities conflict, but now Tris does not hide her Divergent status.

² Veronica Roth, *Divergent*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins e-books, 2011). Kindle edition 25.

The Giver, by Lois Lowry, is another supposedly perfect society where everything is managed by the Committee of Elders from marriages (Match) to naming children, and jobs. The author gives no city name or country, but other cities exist because Jonas hears of “Elsewhere” to which people can be “released”; also, Jonas recalls an airplane flying over the city, which causes the city officials to send everyone inside. No clear relation is made to the outside societies, other than it is bad to be “released”.

Jonas is a boy who lives in the city that appears perfect. At the age of twelve, every child must attend the “Ceremony of Twelve”. The ceremony bestows the adult job or “Assignment” on the children. Jonas becomes the Receiver of Memory, the most important Elder, to whom the leaders of the community, the Committee of Elders, would receive council on difficult matters. Jonas becomes a receiver-in-training under the actual Receiver, to whom Jonas meets every day to receive memories. When Jonas meets with the Receiver, the training begins with the elder (now the Giver) laying a hand on Jonas. The touch transfers a memory to Jonas. The memories are both painful and pleasurable; some are war and others are sledding. Jonas begins to feel the memories ought to be shared, so that the burden becomes lighter for the Receiver, who alone carries all memories of suffering and joy. Jonas and the Giver agree that Jonas will leave to “Elsewhere” freeing the memories so that they return to the community. The novel’s explanation of how that works is unclear, but somehow leaving the community returns the memories to people. The Giver remains behind to coach the people through the initial pain, but the people will learn life is better with color, music, joy, etc. which also means suffering will return. Jonas leaves the city and suffers starvation and cold for the first

time, but the book ends with him arriving at log cabin, supposedly to a family that knows the true depth of feelings.

Feed, by M.T. Anderson, is another oppressive society for teenagers. The United States has allowed the economic sector to grow beyond a healthy boundary. The near future society permits parents to implant computers into their babies, thus fusing technology and the person together. The story follows two protagonists: Titus received the implant as a baby, which means the parents agree with society; the other, Violet, is allowed to decide for herself whether to receive the implant, as shown in the quote below. The italics in the following quote indicate mental chatting, unspoken conversation between Titus and Violet via their feeds. Violet explains the feed, and Titus is shocked. Bolded names are added for clarity.

Violet: “Then she went, We didn’t have enough money. When I was little. And my dad and mom didn’t want me to have one.

Titus: Holy shit.

Violet: I got it when I was seven.

Titus: I’m sorry, I said.

Violet: For what?

Titus: For not knowing. You know, that so many people don’t have them.

Violet: No one with feeds thinks about it, she said. When you have the feed all your life, you’re brought up to not think about things. Like them never telling you that it’s a republic and not a democracy. It’s something that makes me angry, what people don’t know about these days. Because of the feed, we’re raising a nation of idiots. Ignorant, self-centered idiots.”³

Perception of reality has changed; a person is able to mchat (mental chat) at any moment. Also, a person is assaulted with mental advertisements at any given time of the day.

³ M. T. Anderson, *Feed*, Kindle edition ed. (Somerville, M.A.: Candlewick Press, 2010), Electronic. 112-13.

“I was trying to talk to Link, but I couldn’t because I was getting bannered so hard, and I kept blinking and trying to walk forward with my carry-on. I can’t hardly remember any of it. I just remember that everything in the banners looked goldy and sparkling, but as we walked down to the luggage, all the air vents were streaked with black.”⁴

People can turn the feed off, but rarely do in a society addicted to consumption.

Titus’ doesn’t fully realize the unhealthiness of the society until the end of the novel when co-protagonist Violet dies.

“This is the story.” And for the first time, I started crying. I cried, sitting by her bed, and I told her the story of us. “It’s about the feed,” I said. “It’s about this meg normal guy, who doesn’t think about anything until one wacky day, when he meets a dissident with a heart of gold.” I said, “Set against the backdrop of America in its final days, it’s the high-spirited story of their love together, it’s laugh-out-loud funny, really heartwarming, and a visual feast.” I picked up her hand and held it to my lips. I whispered to her fingers. “Together, the two crazy kids grow, have madcap escapades, and learn an important lesson about love. They learn to resist the feed. Rated PG-13. For language,” I whispered, “and mild sexual situations.”⁵

The crying is the first genuine emotion in the novel. Titus (like Jonas and Tris and Katniss) moves beyond the ignorant selfish reality and is able to care for someone other than himself.

With that background in mind, the plot the plot runs that Violet grows lonely, so she decides to vacation over spring break on the moon where she meets Titus who is traveling with friends. A hacker enters the bar in which Titus and Violet meet and touches them transferring a virus. The teens wake up in a hospital with the feeds shutdown. The chapter “Eden” shows a community enjoying each other not as products but as people. Everyone heals except for Violet, who slowly breaks down like a product.

⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁵ Ibid., 297-98.

In between her death and that moment, she attempts to resist the feed. She does so through never purchasing anything, and attempting to create a customer profile with an aberrant research history so that the corporation never pigeon hole her for advertisements. The point is, corporations enjoy simple minded customers who can be easily classified (therefore marketed) due to their purchase history. If she never purchases, it becomes difficult to know what she wants. If she randomly browses the internet for products, the corporations algorithms are not sophisticated enough to classify her. Thus, while she is dying, Violet learns the corporations could fix her feed but chose not to. The assumption is that she is not a valuable consumer, therefore allowed to die. Along the way though, she attends parties with Titus observing that people think social acceptance comes from the newest product. When Titus notices the health problems affect his social life, he stops their friendship. She was a product that broke down, and Titus throws away broken products or stops using them because something newer comes out. However, her death shocks him into awareness.

Methodology

I will briefly explain the methodology: Social empowerment approach to narrative pedagogy. Instead of using it in a classroom (hence the word pedagogy) I adapted it for fiction; it will be applied to young adult (YA) fiction. It will be a literary methodology to help understand the popularity of YA dystopian novels. Using the word popularity implies a large readership. I will not be doing original research with the audience, but an operative assumption will be that a problem has been raised among young adults because of their interest dystopian novels. Thus, I will name the issue and reply to it with theological reflection in comparison to Genesis 3:7-9.

In the actual case studies of societal empowerment approach to narrative pedagogy, Frank Rogers connects the issue derived from the methodology to religion, deepening the problem and strengthening the response. Liberation theology undergirds the societal empowerment approach to narrative pedagogy. The heart of liberation theology is “critical reflection on praxis in the light of the word of God.”⁶ This helps teens see where the transcendent appears in the stories, to move beyond their limited perspective. If the stories truthfully represent their inner story, the divine is there, but needs to be untangled; hence the meaning of finding *God in the graffiti*.

Societal empowerment narrative pedagogy comes with assumptions: a purpose, kind of story, and source of power to create change. First, the purpose is to create social change. Second, the kinds of stories are those with a global issue. Third, it is a personally moving issue; the issue has something vital is at stake, which is most likely something painful or oppressive. A note on the pain: for the social issue to be about empowerment the pain has to cause collective empowerment issues. Hence, the issue is global. Fourth, the source of power is twofold. First source is fiction.

“These concerns for liberation from inner dislocation, societal destructiveness, and fatal entrapment are concerns not only of theologians but of novelists as well, and the two disciplines working in tandem can offer occasions for us to participate in fiction’s liberating power.”⁷

Narratively the power comes from creative imagination. The second source of power is numbers—people inspired collectively to make social change. Whether the stories actually inspire social change in the readers is not part of the paper.

⁶ Robert McAfee Brown, *Liberation theology: an introductory guide* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993). 57.

⁷ ———, *Persuade us to rejoice: the liberating power of fiction*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992). 14.

Preview

Chapter 1 explains the problem of individualism in the four dystopian novels. First, I explain the internal and external threats to keep citizens silent and obedient to the dystopian society. Second, I break down individualism used by the governments to silence people. I will cover six areas the dystopian societies touch in order to make people mute: survival, language, love, black and white thinking, leisure, and mirrors. Third, people will not remain mute forever, so I will cover how people regain their voice. Last, I raise the question of where God enters into the problem of individualism, or if the problem is cyclical without reconciliation.

Chapter 2 follows the natural sequence of Genesis 3:7-9. I interpret the text in light of the dystopian novels to discover the attributes of God's community. I will first look at how humans begin the process of separation from God (Genesis 3:7). Then, Adam and Eve create a second level of separation from God: they heard the "sound of the Lord God" and hid themselves (Genesis 3:8). Genesis 3:9 suggests grace through the question that calls humans into community "where are you?" Unlike the totalitarian societies, God creates community through an invitation. God invites people into community through open communication. In the conclusion, I reverse the problem and name the attributes essential to utopian society based on open communication.

CHAPTER 2

INDIVIDUALISM AND DYSTOPIA

Internal and External Threats

The majority in these novels accept reality in order to keep society together and avoid the alternative scenario, which is a form of conflict. Most importantly, an unhealthy view of conflict--that all conflict is unhealthy--silences people from objecting to the status quo.

This is the external threat. *Divergent* believes their way of life prevents war. “I think the system persists because we’re afraid of what might happen if it didn’t: war.”¹ Thus their founders of the system created factions to prevent war.

“Decades ago our ancestors realized that it is not political ideology, religious belief, race, or nationalism that is to blame for a warring world. Rather, they determined that it was the fault of human personality— of humankind’s inclination toward evil, in whatever form that is. They divided into factions that sought to eradicate those qualities they believed responsible for the world’s disarray.”²

Marcus, the Abnegation leader at the Choosing Ceremony for sixteen year olds, highlights the faults of human personality: Aggression, ignorance, duplicity, selfishness,

¹ Roth, *Divergent*. 33.

² *Ibid.*, 42.

and cowardice.³ Thus, the virtue factions were born to prevent war: Amity, Erudite, Candor, Abnegation, and Dauntless.

Factions limit individual human power to gain collective peace, but that is the opposite of how the book phrases it: “Welcome to the Choosing Ceremony. Welcome to the day we honor the democratic philosophy of our ancestors, which tells us that every man has the right to choose his own way in this world.”⁴ Like *Feed*, the irony is that the system is not a democracy, but something else. The characters cannot choose their way in the world.

The *Giver* creates a society afraid of suffering. “But then everyone would be burdened and pained. They don’t want that. And that’s the real reason The Receiver is so vital to them, and so honored.”⁵

Feed has a society afraid of material poverty to fill their emptiness. “The thing I hate about space is that you can feel how old and empty it is. I don’t know if the others felt like I felt, about space? But I think they did, because they all got louder.”⁶ The feed bombards them with advertisements to keep them consuming and addicted (hence the pun on the title *Feed*), promising the latest product will keep them filled. In truth, they are empty addicts. The hacker who touched Titus and Violet at the club reveals this insight.

³ Ibid., 42-43.

⁴ Ibid., 41-42.

⁵ Lois Lowry, *The Giver*, (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Books for Children, 2000). 113.

⁶ Anderson, *Feed*: 4.

“They said that they had identified him, and that he was a hacker and a naysayer of the worst kind. We were frightened, and kept touching our heads. Suddenly, our heads felt real empty.”⁸

The hacker, who resisted the system, was clubbed to death by the police at the night club.

The Hunger Games is different than the previous novels, because the poor are the main characters and *want a new society*. The poor are not scared of the alternative if the current system was overthrown. Rather, it is the citizens of Panem, the capitol, that receives the benefits of the tribute system; they fear a societal overhaul. President Snow uses the same threats to maintain peace with the districts, but they are aware in their poverty that relationships and community have disintegrated. Thus, the societies in *Feed*, *The Giver*, and *Divergent* are the equivalent of Panem in terms of receiving the supposed benefits of the system: a life of peace, pleasure, leisure, and luxury. However, the poor see through the blandishments.

The wealthy are convinced their society is better than the supposed consequences. That is, the belief that peace, pleasure, leisure, and luxury are better than conflict, pain, loneliness, and social chaos. Yet, they aren't living a life of peace and pleasure and luxury and freedom. As the story pushes forward, the ideology of the state is rather a contract with death. By the end of each novel, the society is destroyed, and in the case of *Feed*, the main character dies while society is on the verge of death.

The internal threat is to take away choice in community and provide the only option for community. The societies have a monopoly on the only source of community. The societies claim their way of life is best (stops war, pain, etc.). Thus, the greatest threat is exile. The societies use individualism so that the only source of community is

⁸ Anderson, *Feed*: 46.

society. Ultimately, this is another threat to silence people from objecting to the status quo, because they fear exile.

The Giver threatens exile; this is doublespeak for death. “But you can. It says so in the rules. If you don’t fit in, you can apply for Elsewhere and be released.”⁹ However, “Elsewhere” is death; and to be “released” is a source of shame: “For a contributing citizen to be released from the community was a final decision, a terrible punishment, an overwhelming statement of failure.”¹⁰

Divergent threatens with the only source of community: the faction system. The person is removed and deprived of wealth and community.

“What if they tell me that I’m not cut out for any faction? I would have to live on the streets, with the factionless. I can’t do that. To live factionless is not just to live in poverty and discomfort; it is to live divorced from society, separated from the most important thing in life: community.”¹¹

The Hunger Games avoids doublespeak. The punishments are clear: a person can become an Avox (tongue cut out and slavery); or simply torture or death. During the ranking interview, Katniss tries to impress the Gamemakers because they will rank her against other competitors. Instead, the Gamemakers are focused on food, ignoring her. She shoots an arrow at an apple sitting in a pig’s mouth among the Gamemakers. She reflects afterward, “What will they do to me now? Arrest me? Execute me? Cut my tongue and turn me into an Avox so I can wait on the future tributes of Panem?”¹²

⁹ Lowry, *The Giver*. 48.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹ Roth, *Divergent*. 20.

¹² Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*, (New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 2008). 103.

Feed's internal consequence is isolation or another doublespeak for death. The corporations stop feeding people who do not purchase goods. With no other options for community, Violet had to be part of the system. Most people have the internet connected to the body as a baby, but she waited until she was older, when she could make the decision for herself, at which point she realized it was the only connection to community. The consequence was the technology did not grow properly into her body. The feed is another organ when implanted at a young age. When done too late—as in Violet's case—the feed is a foreign transplant with a high percentage of being rejected.

Feed parallels the destruction of the Mayan civilization the United States. The analogy links Mayan human sacrifice to Violet's sacrifice to keep the economic system running.¹³ Violet refused to consume like the rest of the teens, and she is a sacrifice to the system. She becomes a human tribute to the Gods, not unlike the tributes in *The Hunger Games*.

Overall, characters in dystopian novels are afraid of external and internal threats. Despite the efforts by the governments to threaten them, humans still need community. Once someone is absolutely individualized, existential anxiety emerges. Walter Brueggemann argues the modern problem of “autonomous freedom” causes anxiety outside of the community of God.¹⁴ Pain causes people to cry out. However, there is no cry if individualism removes the voice.

¹³ Anderson, *Feed*: 187, 217, 18.

¹⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 1st ed., Interpretation: a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010). 54.

Mute

People cannot stop the system without a voice. Katniss fears becoming an Avox with her tongue cut out. That threat silences her, along with the district system that separates her from other people. Also, it is illegal for her to leave the boundaries of District Twelve. In other words, modern individualism destroys whatever assists communication: community, cooperation, self-awareness, etc. Due to the internal and external threats, I will cover six areas the dystopian societies touch in order to make people mute: survival, language, love, black and white thinking, leisure, and mirrors.

Survival

The novels have “market societies.” The first reason people become mute is competition. Since one’s success depends on competition, it is a disadvantage to communicate honestly with others. People learn to survive alone.

“The market society isolates people, destroys their communities, and infects them with the prison of competition...an ‘individual,’ like and ‘atom’ in Greek, is literally that ultimate element of indivisibility. What can no longer be divided has no relationships; it cannot communicate anymore...If a human individual has no relationships, he or she also has no characteristics and no name. Such a person is unrecognizable and cannot even know himself or herself.”¹⁵

The Hunger Games needs no explanation except for the title. Children, as young as 12, learn that they must compete against other districts in *The Hunger Games*. As long as Katniss cannot trust a fellow tribute, competition will destroy communication. Therefore, individualism at the heart of competition is distrust. If no one trusts each other, then individualism triumphs over community. I trust myself and no one else. “We

¹⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, "Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology," in *Trinity, community, and power: mapping trajectories in Wesleyan theology*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood Books, 2000), 123, 24.

don't trust one another as much, and we don't know one another as much."¹⁶ The quote from Robert D. Putnam is about television's effect on America's social fabric.

The characters in the novels distrust each other so that individualism turns into a matter of surviving (hence the popularity of the reality TV show *Survivor*). Moltmann likens the ancient Roman strategy of "divide-and-rule-method" to America's individualism. "The modern "individual" is, in this respect, the end-product of a certain "divide-and-rule-method" to which we are all subjugated , especially by television, as Noam Chomsky has demonstrated."¹⁷

The Robert Putnam and Moltmann quotes highlight TV as a tool of the government to separate people from each other. TV focused on games of competition and survival. *The Hunger Games* is the Super Bowl of televised events numbing the citizens of Panem so that entertainment distracts them from communication and community.

Surviving destroys love. "Katniss will pick whoever she thinks she can't survive without."¹⁸ Peeta is talking here to Gale about Katniss deciding on a boyfriend. Katniss interprets Gale's words: "As if in the end, it will be the question of whether a baker or a hunter will extend my longevity the most. It is a horrible thing for Gale to say and for Peeta not to refute."¹⁹ Yet, the end of the book she verifies Peeta was correct. Katniss embodies survival, which is wired into human DNA. *The Hunger Games* series ends with

¹⁶ Kortright Davis, *Serving with power: reviving the spirit of Christian ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999). 5.

¹⁷Moltmann, "Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology," 124.

¹⁸ Suzanne Collins, *Mockingjay*, (New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 2010). 325.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 330.

a remark on surviving. “I’ll tell them how I survive it.”²⁰ Katniss will someday tell her children about surviving; not about love, not about trust, or sacrifice (even though that’s how it started for Katniss). In a way, individualism is a regression of human development: “We are told that the crisis of survival was so much a pivotal part of early human existence that most of daily life was spent in hunting for the means of sustenance. To hunt was to live and to live was to hunt.”²¹

Survival destroys cooperation (which is based on trust). The initiation in *Divergent* becomes violent. At one point, someone is stabbed in the eye while sleeping in order to remove competition.²²

Violet in *Feed* has no choice but to not cooperate, “What I’m doing, what I’ve been doing over the feed for the last two days, is trying to create a customer profile that’s so screwed, no one can market to it. I’m not going to let them catalog me. I’m going to become invisible.”²³ Unfortunately, the subtext of “invisible” is dead. A competitive business stays lean, cutting any excess fat. The corporations have the money to fix the malfunction in Violet’s feed, but that would have been a bad investment when she never purchases anything. That is to say Violet disconnects from her food source, the source of her life in that society; hence the title of the book *Feed*. Violet’s “divergent” personality, which is the root of evil in *Divergent*, cannot remain uncategorized.

²⁰ Ibid., 390.

²¹ Davis, *Serving with power: reviving the spirit of Christian ministry*: 8.

²² Roth, *Divergent*. 202.

²³ Anderson, *Feed*: 98.

Language

Feed depicts the deterioration of communications with the inability to express feelings. A criminal hijacked Violet and Titus while vacationing on the moon. Titus, who is in the hospital due to the hijacker, listens to his dad say “She’s like, whoa, she’s like so stressed out. This is . . . Dude,” he said. “Dude, this is some way bad shit.”²⁴ Titus had asked about his mom’s reaction to the hijacker disabling Titus’ feed. The dad is not mimicking how teenagers talk. Everyone in the book speaks this way; the author argues that the entire system of language has diminished. This is a form of control (cf. *1984* by George Orwell). Even the American President cannot speak with clarity.

“It is our duty as Americans, and as a nation dedicated to freedom and free commerce, to stand behind our fellow Americans and not cast . . . things at them. Stones, for example. The first stone. By this I mean that we shouldn’t think that there are any truth to the rumors that the lesions are the result of any activity of American industry.”²⁵

There is no language at all in an Avox, a slave in the city of Panem (*The Hunger Games*). Literally the word from Latin means “without voice”. Katniss asks for a definition of an Avox from her mentor Haymitch.

“What’s an Avox?” I ask stupidly.

“Someone who committed a crime. They cut her tongue so she can’t speak,” says Haymitch. “She’s probably a traitor of some sort. Not likely you’d know her.”²⁶

The irony is that Katniss already knows; therefore, she is also an Avox condoning the oppression. Unaware of her condition in the first book of the *The Hunger Games*, she

²⁴ Ibid., 55.

²⁵ Ibid., 85.

²⁶ Collins, *The Hunger Games*. 77.

finally realizes everyone is a mute slave. In other words, Avox is a term for everyone affected by the oppression of the state.

“I am Avox mute, choking on my grief.”²⁷

Love

As already mentioned with the topic of survival, *The Hunger Games* shows that the market has divided intimate relationships and family. “That I can’t explain how things are with Gale because I don’t know myself... That if I do have feelings for him, it doesn’t matter because I’ll never be able to afford the kind of love that leads to a family, to children.”²⁸ Two issues break down family: self-awareness, competition, and money.

In the context of the quote, Peeta realized Katniss faked her love for him in the first Hunger Games to survive.

“It was all for the Games,” Peeta says. “How you acted.”

“Not all of it,” I say, tightly holding on to my flowers.²⁹

She does not love Peeta, but loves her sister. The flowers most likely symbolize her sister, Prim, for whom she entered the games. Moreover, she reveals the “competitive prison” of the market economy when she says she can’t afford a certain kind of love. Also, the government has successfully broken down relationships to the point that Katniss lacks self-awareness (i.e. identity). If she cannot know herself, then she opens herself to another in vulnerability.

²⁷ ———, *Mockingjay*. 137.

²⁸ ———, *The Hunger Games*. 373.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 372.

In *Divergent*, after a person chooses a faction at the age of sixteen, one must shift allegiance primarily to the faction. “Attachment to your family suggests you aren’t entirely pleased with your faction, which would be shameful.”³⁰

Black and White

Individualism simplifies people in order to facilitate reality management. For example, factions represents either/or thinking. A person has to be smart all of the time, honest every moment, etc. “I doubt all the Erudite want to study all the time, or that every Candor enjoys a lively debate, but they can’t defy the norms of their factions any more than I can.”³¹

Individualism creates prejudice, a form of either/or thinking. Dystopian societies demand citizens to live with the status quo and not against it. In the case of Tris’ brother, Caleb, he had to hide his strongest quality, intelligence, while living a life not true to his personality in Abnegation. The result is oppression, people hid their true selves. This happens every day, for example, with sexual identities: Homosexuals in a heterosexual society avoid the hurt of homophobia through hidden sexual identities. Society for teenagers today is like an oak tree growing in an orange crate.³²

At the end of *Divergent*, Tris is liberated from the oppressive system of factions. Tris looks forward to a life with nuance. She can be divergent, both brave and kind, and more importantly, honest with her weakness and strengths. “We are creatures of loss; we

³⁰ Roth, *Divergent*. 176.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³² John Berard, Rick Bartlett, and James Penner, *Consuming youth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2010). 61. The authors take the metaphor from David F. White, *Practicing discernment with youth: a transformative youth ministry approach*, Youth ministry alternatives (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2005). 58.

have left everything behind. I have no home, no path, and no certainty. I am no longer Tris, the selfless, or Tris, the brave. I suppose that now, I must become more than either.”³³ In her poverty, she is able to grow.

Individualism makes people less unique, contrary to common sense of the modern era. Violet is an extreme example of an individual fighting the oppressive system that attempts to simplify products and people for greater profits:

“It’s like a spiral: They keep making everything more basic so it will appeal to everyone. And gradually, everyone gets used to everything being basic, so we get less and less varied as people, more simple. So the corps make everything even simpler. And it goes on and on.”³⁴

Leisure

Stigmas are not the only problem for many of the main characters, but also the problem of leisure silences of people through sedation: “The quality of life today is burdened not so much by problems of having or not having, but by problems of becoming, and the threat of meaningless.”³⁵ This problem is particular to *Feed* and *The Hunger Games*, because greed and entertainment work symbiotically while numbing the minds of people.³⁶ The governments encourage trivial leisure to prevent community: the wealthy become lost in games, entertainment, fashion, and other inane activities.

Divergent and *The Giver* have assigned responsibilities, therefore reducing—not eliminating—leisure hours. Tris and Jonas have less time to break rules. It is like a parent

³³ Roth, *Divergent*. 487.

³⁴ Anderson, *Feed*: 97.

³⁵ Davis, *Serving with power: reviving the spirit of Christian ministry*: 9.

³⁶ Berard, Bartlett, and Penner, *Consuming youth*: 26.

who wants their child to have a summer job to keep them out of trouble. For example, Tris cannot leave the compound of her faction during free time, but she does.

“Hey,” he says, setting his hands on my shoulders. “I’m thrilled to see you, okay? It’s just that this isn’t allowed. There are rules.”

“I don’t care,” I say. “I don’t care, okay?”³⁷

This refers to Tris seeing her brother during free time. Essentially what seems like leisure is pre-chosen options.

In *The Hunger Games*, citizens in Panem are free to do as they want, except the fashion and entertainment is pre-chosen (i.e. the Hunger Games). For example, Cinna, Katniss’ stylist, defies the standards of fashion and the government kills him before Katniss enters the Hunger Games arena. “I must be strong. I owe it to Cinna, who risked everything by undermining President Snow and turning my bridal silk into mockingjay plumage.”³⁸ Also, supposedly Katniss gains leisure and wealth after winning the games; but, *Catching Fire* exposes her grueling schedule to promote the games eliminating her leisure and reassuring Panem the Hunger Games never go away.

The citizens of Panem worry about hair styles, clothing trends, and the next Hunger Games gossip. The lack of depth is evident in Katniss’ attitude towards her stylist team. “My prep team. My foolish, shallow, affectionate pets, with their obsessions with feathers and parties, nearly break my heart with their good-bye.”³⁹ She treats them like animals. “Animals can experience hunger and thirst, but they do not know humiliation

³⁷ Roth, *Divergent*. 352.

³⁸ Suzanne Collins, *Catching Fire*, (New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 2009). 267.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 247.

and dire poverty.”⁴⁰ The prep team is so far removed from reality that they would never know true feelings beyond a humiliating party experience. Like *The Giver*, unless people can feel the tension of sin and grace, or a fuller range of genuine emotions, they cannot become a true person.

Feed is an entire novel of teenagers preoccupied with the next coolest product to remain part of the cool group. For one, the teenagers become concerned about lesions, a cut in their skin. TV influences Violet’s fashion.

“Violet was standing near the fountain and she had a real low shirt on, to show off her lesion, because the stars of the Oh? Wow! Thing! had started to get lesions, so now people were thinking better about lesions, and lesions even looked kind of cool.”⁴¹

The author could be making the point that teens kill themselves keeping up with the next best thing. Girls go into the bathroom and come out with a new style, because the feed in their brain instantaneously updated their hair styles. “Once, she went to the bathroom, casual-like, and came back with her hair parted a different place. Calista and Quendy watched her. Later, without saying anything, they went and did theirs different like that, too.”⁴²

⁴⁰ José Comblin, *Called for freedom: the changing context of liberation theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998).

⁴¹ Anderson, *Feed*: 96.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 52.

Mirrors

Community is a mirror for self-awareness. “If a human individual has no relationships, he or she also has no characteristics and no name. Such a person is unrecognizable and cannot even know himself or herself.”⁴³

In the dystopian novels, there is no community to know what a person looks like. Individualism isolates the individual so that they cannot become aware of themselves. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss lives in survival mode, in distrust of everyone. She has no relationships to affirm her identity. “That I can’t explain how things are with Gale because I don’t know myself...”⁴⁴ Also, Peeta worries the competition of the Hunger Games will destroy his integrity. “I don’t know how to say it exactly. Only . . . I want to die as myself. Does that make any sense?”⁴⁵

People lose themselves to society. Conversely, individuals reflect the values of the community. This is the case with leisure, fashion, and entertainment. Peeta will lose himself to the competition of the Hunger Games, just as Panem and the wealthy will lose themselves to money. In the context of liberation theology, José Comblin comments on personalities and consumer culture: “We will have the triumph of the culture market...millions of restless consumers seeking their lost personalities. What is true of peoples is also true of individual persons.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Moltmann, "Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology," 123, 24.

⁴⁴ Collins, *The Hunger Games*. 373.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁴⁶ Comblin, *Called for freedom: the changing context of liberation theology*: 151.

In *Divergent*, limited mirror use governs self-awareness. Tris is born into Abnegation where “THERE IS ONE mirror in my house.”⁴⁷ The nature of Abnegation is selflessness, and it goes to an extreme; social critic Os Guinness observes the danger of this, “...excess of virtue can itself be an abuse of power.”⁴⁸ A virtue is a mean between two extremes, according Aristotle in his *Nichomachean Ethics*, and denial of mirrors is an example of an extreme. Tris wants to look at herself, “I sneak a look at my reflection when she isn’t paying attention— not for the sake of vanity, but out of curiosity.”⁴⁹ Supposedly a mirror encourages selfishness, and so once every three months mirrors are used for haircuts.

Mirrors prevent self-awareness in the *The Giver* as well. It seems the community tries to eliminate awareness with memories and mirrors because both are a form of reflection. In regards to memories, eliminating them prevents self-awareness and communal awareness because memories reflect the possibility of change. *The Giver* reflects the truth of post-modern life according church historian Sydney Ahlstrom, “Eschewing tradition, fearing the grip of the past, pessimistic about the future, he lives—or tries to live—within the narrow confines of today.”⁵⁰ Under the “royal consciousness” or “false consciousness” it benefits the power holders to reduce our minds to the present.⁵¹ When

⁴⁷ Roth, *Divergent*. 1.

⁴⁸ Os Guinness, *A free people's suicide: sustainable freedom and the American future* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2012). 24.

⁴⁹ Roth, *Divergent*.

⁵⁰ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A religious history of the American people*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004). xxi.

⁵¹ Walter Brueggemann, *The prophetic imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001). location 172.

citizens have no past to reflect upon, the present is the only source, and when controlled by a totalitarian government, then citizens cannot change the present. The consequence is that *The Giver* shows a society hiding pain and living with shallow emotions: “Our eyes are witness to the callousness and cruelty of man, but our heart tries to obliterate the memories, to calm the nerves, and to silence our conscience.”⁵²

“Mirrors were rare in the community; they weren’t forbidden...”⁵³ At this point in the plot, Jonas knows nothing of the Receiver. He is reflecting on the light eyes of a new baby. Not many people had light eyes, except for himself, the baby, and another girl. “He felt self-conscious, realizing that he, too, had that look.”⁵⁴ In the whole book two things are forbidden. First, the Receiver cannot share his work with anyone. Second, books are forbidden in the community except for the Receiver and Receiver in training. Mirrors, memories, and books—Mirrors aren’t forbidden, but all of these are limited or forbidden in order to govern self-awareness.

The depth that Jonas noticed in the eyes of the baby is a symptom of society. They have lost depth in life from suffering to joy, sin to grace. Jonas sought a word to capture the light color eyes of the baby. “Depth, he decided; as if one were looking into the clear water of the river, down to the bottom, where things might lurk which hadn’t been discovered yet.”⁵⁵ Jonas had not discovered the depth yet, but he will through communication with the Receiver.

⁵² Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2007). 5, Volume 1.

⁵³ Lowry, *The Giver*. 21.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Jonas has various attributes that incline the Committee of Elders to choose Jonas as the next Receiver: intelligence, integrity, courage, wisdom, and “Capacity to See Beyond.”⁵⁶ Jonas’ power to “See Beyond” is the imagination to break through the reality of the present. When a community has no past, thus no alternate futures, they have become subjugated to the totalitarian mindset of the rulers in the present. Walter Brueggemann observes this truth in prophetic literature and lifts it up for the current age: “We need to ask if our consciousness and imagination have been so assaulted and co-opted by the royal consciousness that we have been robbed of the courage or power to think an alternative thought.”⁵⁷ Jonas has the courage and power to “See Beyond”. With the memories, his power to see alternate futures will grow in strength.

The issue behind the mirrors in *The Giver* and *Divergent* is awareness leading to self-awareness, relational depth, and communal empowerment. Individuals raising the awareness of others is a concept well supported in liberation theology through Paulo Frère.⁵⁸ Jonas might evangelize his self-awareness, turning it into community. For example, if Jonas were allowed to use mirrors, or photographs, etc., he may start to question his appearance in relation to elderly people. The community forbids any knowledge of grandparents; that is, Jonas doesn’t know the concept of parents having parents (i.e. grandparents). However, Jonas may use the knowledge of his looks to deduce the forbidden knowledge. Mirrors assist self-awareness, even though it is skin deep reflection.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 63.

⁵⁷ Brueggemann, *The prophetic imagination*: 39.

⁵⁸ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing liberation theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987). 5.

Part of the concept of consciousness-raising is participation.⁵⁹ If Jonas became aware of grandparents and great-grandparents, he may want to know them. He could help others understand the importance of older generations, organize a movement, and finally work to deepen communal relationships. Therefore, the power holders need to keep Jonas isolated otherwise he might try to raise awareness in his community. They are unable to do so.

Exile

Sometimes only one or a few people realize the problem of individualism. The dehumanization is often an unconscious process people are unaware is happening to them. Frank Rogers observes the struggle of the modern teenager, “The depth of pain youth are exposed to, and the sophistication of the systems that sustain it, are so overwhelming it is often difficult to resist giving in to their inevitability or numbing out and ignoring them altogether.”⁶⁰

Once Jonas has an awareness of memories, he felt hopeless about the future. Often individualism can lead to fatalism. “He felt such love for Asher and for Fiona. But they could not feel it back, without the memories. And he could not give them those. Jonas knew with certainty that he could change nothing.”⁶¹

Society eliminated pain but also joy, when memories were given to a single person. The depth of human emotions causes the society to constrict and shrink into a shallow river. However, Jonas wants justice to “roll down like water” (Amos 5:24). As

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Rogers, *Finding God in the graffiti: empowering teenagers through stories*: 3002, 03.

⁶¹ Lowry, *The Giver*. 135.

Receiver in Training taking on the community's memories, Jonas discovers the bottom of the river. "Thinking, as he always did, about precision of language, Jonas realized that it was a new depth of feelings that he was experiencing."⁶²

Jose Comblin argues to be truly a Christian person, one must live with the tension of sin and grace, but so many people are covering up sin with forms of entertainment.⁶³ Unless we can feel the pain of life, people will continue to justify the status quo.⁶⁴ The four novels show societies that need liberation, and once liberated, people are allowed to move beyond fight or flight, avoidance, or ignorance of reality and communicate in community. Liberated people free to become their true self.⁶⁵ True selves can have a true community.

Jonas becomes aware of the problem, through community with the Receiver, and they do something about it. "He would have lived a life hungry for feelings, for color, for love."⁶⁶ With his training to receive the memories, the context changes his interpretation of society. Not only does Jonas flee society, he believes leaving the community is best for everyone. The memories will return to the community once he has left. "The worst part of holding the memories is not the pain. It's the loneliness of it. Memories need to be shared."⁶⁷ The wisdom of the Receiver is supported by theologian Walter Brueggeman:

⁶² Ibid., 131.

⁶³ Comblin, *Called for freedom: the changing context of liberation theology*.

⁶⁴ Brueggemann, *The prophetic imagination*: 11.

⁶⁵ Comblin, *Called for freedom: the changing context of liberation theology*: 97.

⁶⁶ Lowry, *The Giver*.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 154.

“The public sharing of pain is one way to let the reality sink in and let the death go;”⁶⁸

That is exactly what Jonas does with the Receiver. They share the memories with each other, lightening the burden. Terrance Fretheim writes about the necessity of memories in community, even for God: “God remembers how good things used to be, and sees how that has now all changed...God does not keep those memories to himself; God shares them with the people.”⁶⁹

Overall, the characters have to become the greatest fear of the community in order to grow. Separation from the dominant consciousness is growth. In *Divergent*, Tris was divergent from the beginning of the novel. She never fit into a category perfectly. At the end of the novel, she finally gets the opportunity to grow, but only after facing her greatest fear: the greatest fear in that society was having no faction. “We are creatures of loss; we have left everything behind. I have no home, no path, and no certainty. I am no longer Tris, the selfless, or Tris, the brave. I suppose that now, I must become more than either.”⁷⁰

Jonas’ society eliminates memories to prevent pain. The system is flawed so Jonas wants to grow individually. The greatest fear comes true for him in order to flourish as an individual and communally. Jonas “released” himself, therefore ironically proving that pain creates life; from death comes life. The question of starving is something Joan will never have to face. “You have never been starving, he had been told.

⁶⁸ Brueggemann, *The prophetic imagination*: 117.

⁶⁹ Terence E. Fretheim, *The suffering of God: an old Testament perspective*, Overtures to Biblical theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). 113, 14.

⁷⁰ Roth, *Divergent*. 487.

You will never be starving.”⁷¹ However he must know hunger to know satisfaction. Before that realization, he thinks he had made the wrong choice. “Once he had yearned for choice. Then, when he had had a choice, he had made the wrong one: the choice to leave. And now he was starving.”⁷² He then continues the line of thought and honestly confronts the situation. In the midst of new suffering, he gains spiritual and aesthetic treasures: “He would have lived a life hungry for feelings, for color, for love.”⁷³ Jonas lives with hunger, but is on his way to a better life; one in which humans risk personal well-being for the love of another person.

Jonas gets away from his society, but Violet in *Feed* does not. The death shocks Titus into awareness. Before the death, Violet’s dad harangues Titus:

“We Americans,” he said, “are interested only in the consumption of our products. We have no interest in how they were produced, or what happens to them” — he pointed at his daughter — “what happens to them once we discard them, once we throw them away.”⁷⁴

An interesting shift happens. He is speaking about products and suddenly the product is his daughter. When a person breaks, it is time to find a new friend. Violet’s dad, and Violet’s death raise Titus’ consciousness. He had treated Violet like a product; as soon as her feed malfunctioned, Violet-the-product was not new and cool anymore. As a result, Titus lost interest in her.

These particular dystopian societies are extreme in emphasizing the stratification of wealth. The poor are exempt to a degree from the propaganda and doublespeak of the

⁷¹ Lowry, *The Giver*. 173.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 174.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Anderson, *Feed*: 290.

ruling government. They are already in exile. The stories in *Divergent*, *Feed*, and *The Giver* focuses on those who are materially well off, while using poverty to motivate the citizens to remain loyal to the system. *Divergent* threatened poverty if a person resisted the faction system.

“Because they failed to complete initiation into whatever faction they chose, they live in poverty, doing the work no one else wants to do. They are janitors and construction workers and garbage collectors; they make fabric and operate trains and drive buses. In return for their work they get food and clothing, but, as my mother says, not enough of either.”⁷⁵

But, the materially poor live in communities and escape the oppression of the state. The truly poor are the lower districts in *The Hunger Games*; the factionless in *Divergent*; Violet in *Feed*, along with the resistance movement (i.e. the hacker). The poor protest the effects of consumerism through intermittent news “feeds”, where the global opinion rejects the materialism of the United States. The poor have a voice, unlike Tris, Katniss, Violet, Titus, and Jonas. However, each character witness’ the destruction of their society and risks exile (poverty, death, etc.) to gain a voice.

Flawed

Thus human systems are flawed; unable to maintain the peace forever. For instance, *Divergent* is flawed through the pursuit of a single virtue. This quote refers to the danger of Amity. “Those who seek peace above all else, they say, will always deceive to keep the water calm.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Roth, *Divergent*. 25.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

The flaw with Erudite is that they become the oppressor (an allusion to the Knowledge of Good and Evil). The oppressors pursue knowledge in such a way that it is abuse of single virtue, which never leads to societal stability; moreover, virtue alone cannot sustain a free society.⁷⁷ “Valuing knowledge above all else results in a lust for power, and that leads men into dark and empty places. We should be thankful that we know better.”⁷⁸ Beatrice’s father makes this very claim early in the story about the dangers of knowledge. His statement is ironic. He does not know better, because his own faction has abused sacrifice.

Cyclical Problem?

It’s important to recognize the cycle. The problem of individualism is created from the top but sustained from the bottom. In other words, the majority of society sustains the status quo while power holders create reality. The power holders maintain their version of reality for various reasons: peace, wealth, and power. However, the individualism imposed on the majority causes a cycle of change to start: an imposed consciousness by means of individualism causes anxiety and isolation, which leads to numbing and surviving, and finally a few people want awareness and relational depth again.

Any community in time and space has to face the difference of contexts. Does that mean we avoid reconciliation with each other? I fear there is a battle of whose rights are more important. As long as humans try to balance liberation on their own it fails. The

⁷⁷ Guinness, *A free people's suicide: sustainable freedom and the American future*: 24.

⁷⁸ Roth, *Divergent*. 35.

novels show over and over human attempts to build society, destroy society, and rebuild only to fall into destruction again. This is a very familiar theme in Genesis.

Where in the cycle can God intervene to prevent it from happening again? This is a common narrative in the Old Testament: “The Primeval cycle is marked by a cyclical failure of human will in relation to divine will.”⁷⁹

That is not to say God is not already at work. There are glimpses of a genuine community in the novels. Communication emerges in relationships, despite the government’s effort to silence people.

While Dauntless skids toward disaster, Tris glimpses the possibility of living fully as herself and part of the community. She experiences unity and diversity of community while playing capture the flag and zip lining from the Sears tower: “I caught sight of myself in a window on the way into the compound, and my cheeks and eyes were both bright, my hair tangled. I look like I have experienced something powerful.”⁸⁰

After the virus attack, Titus and Violet and their friends are free of the internet while it is being fixed. This scene is the most genuine look at community. They become imaginative to fill their time.

The Giver gives us a glimpse of honest community when Jonas and the Receiver converse about the community and its problems and how to fix them.

The Hunger Games often has a genuine community when Katniss retreats to the forbidden woods to hunt for animals (a possible allusion to the Garden of Eden?).

⁷⁹ Thomas W. Mann, *The Book of the Torah: the narrative integrity of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988). 28.

⁸⁰ Roth, *Divergent*. 225.

God's story begins with community, like the dystopian novels, and quickly falls apart in Genesis 3, but God intervenes.

CHAPTER 3

COMMUNITY AND THE GARDEN OF EDEN

Sin is the choice to pursue individualism to the degree that community in the Garden of Eden falls apart. It is a complete relational separation from the earth, humans, and God. In essence, humans become *mute* after Genesis 3:6 until God gracefully asks a question “Where are you?” (Gen 3:9). I will provide the scripture for this chapter.

⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.⁸ They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ ¹⁰He said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’

Context

As an overview, the Garden of Eden begins in Genesis 2:17 with Adam and Eve unashamed, alive, and connected to God. The Garden of Eden ends with Genesis 3:14-19 where God announces the consequences of eating from the tree of good and evil. In contrast to the beginning, they are ashamed, dying, and disconnected. God told them they would die if they ate of the tree, and subsequently God names the outcome, “God announces the consequences of sin, namely disruption in every relationship.”¹

¹ *Lutheran study Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009). 51, 52.

Specifically, individualism is the disruption of relationships as God intended. However, God intends to restore relationships.

The philosophical question of sin's origin answers nothing. The question is how humans deal with sin and the cyclical failure. Thus, in the Garden of Eden narrative, the four dystopian novels are situated in Genesis 3:7, after Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree. A word study of the "knowledge of good and evil" conducted by Terrence Fretheim concludes "The primary interest of the narrator seems to be on the results of the eating of the tree and not on the tree itself."² The narrator of Genesis 3 wants the reader to focus on the results of disobeying God. Walter Brueggemann agrees on the matter; the philosophical question concerning the origin of sin is not the focus, but the result.³ Evil and sin exist, destroying relationships. We must accept the results and learn to fix the cycle of sin as seen in the dystopian novels.

God is restoring relational boundaries: "The tree and the command define the limits of creatureliness."⁴ In Old Testament language, this is righteousness.

"What human beings consistently lack...is integrity and character—in a word, righteousness. To be righteous is to be genuinely human; to be unrighteous is to be inhuman. One may become subhuman, reverting to a status and behavior beneath the dignity of the "image of God," or one may attempt to become superhuman, trying to "become like God."⁵

The transition into Genesis 3:7 places Adam and Eve as superhuman or subhuman (unrighteous). God wants to restore the boundaries of communication, because from

² Terence E. Fretheim, "The Knowledge of Good and Bad (Gen. 2-3): A Word Study Outline," (2011).

³ Brueggemann, *Genesis*: 43.

⁴ Fretheim, "The Knowledge of Good and Bad (Gen. 2-3): A Word Study Outline."

⁵ Mann, *The Book of the Torah: the narrative integrity of the Pentateuch*: 28, 29.

Genesis 3:1 through 3:8, Adam and Eve are silent. Like the novels, they avoid conflict, pain, and reconciliation.

Since the novels begin in the midst of relational destruction, I will situate the comparison between Genesis 3:7 and 3:9.

Genesis 3:7

Abundance

Genesis 3:7, in light of the dystopian novels, portrays Adam and Eve silent and surviving on their own. This breaks down a God of abundance. “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves” (Gen 3:7). They disliked the nakedness and created technologies (e.g. loincloths) to numb the anxiety through self-sufficiency. Technologies are whatever human creation functions to block the reality of God. That is, after the serpent experience, Adam and Eve are silent in Genesis 3:7-9 relying on their own means to survive.

Humans worry about abundance when concerned with surviving. The Hebrew word nakedness can mean poverty and need.⁶ The serpent phrases the question in a way to present God as someone who withholds, “...you shall not eat from any tree in the garden?” (Gen 3:1). In contrast, God was specific, “...tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat” (Gen 2:17). The serpent turns it into a negative question, as if God forbids every tree. The Serpent makes the assumption that God is not of abundance and

⁶G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974). 351, XI.

generosity, and also the serpent has a leading question to bring up the forbidden tree. The first signs of poverty emerge.

Both cases of “nakedness” in Genesis 2:29 and 3:7 are linked through clever word play with the Hebrew word for craftiness in 3:1, thus intertwining humans and the serpent. Moreover, there are two spellings of nakedness to indicate a change from pre-serpent and post-serpent nakedness.⁷ Humans cross a boundary, taking on some of the qualities of the serpent after obeying the serpent. Genesis 3:1 attributes “craftiness” to the snake, and assumes craftiness is good because it is part of the created order. God gave the snake the ability to be crafty, probably in the same way tributes in the Hunger Games outsmart their counterparts to survive. The difference is that the serpent is an animal. Humans are downgraded to animal status when acting like the serpent.

The disparity is large in terms of what humans make and what God makes. The verb “to make” is used in 3:1 for the serpent and when God surveys all he made.⁸ God made everything from the serpent to the stars. Adam and Eve break down the community and attempt to “make” matters right without God.

Vulnerable

The nakedness in 3:7 has a degree of craftiness to cover their vulnerability, another common definition of nakedness.⁹ Prior to the knowledge of good and evil, they were vulnerable with God. Afterwards, the loincloth defends them from God, because they were ashamed. Individualism becomes solving life’s emotional problems without the

⁷ Ibid., 352, XI.

⁸ William D. Mounce, *Mounce's complete expository dictionary of Old & New Testament words* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006). 431.

⁹ Botterweck and Ringgren, *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament*.

help of God and others. Adam and Eve neither discussed the issue of shame among themselves nor with God.

By covering their vulnerability, human language disappears, or becomes unintelligible, just like the serpent began to do with God's command. Nakedness already indicates the degradation of language in connection to the serpent, but the lack of dialogue leaves a lot of space to interpret how exactly language and vulnerability connect. The clearest message is that Adam and Eve are silent.

In regard to the "loincloths", the Hebrew word for clothing is sometimes rendered as rags: "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isa. 64:5). Adam and Eve dress themselves, but the language gives no indication of attributes. Nevertheless, for Adam and Eve, a better translation might have been rags to explicitly announce their poverty and vulnerability without God. Instead, they stonewall God and try to appear economically and emotionally fine. There is room for interpretation, and given the nature of the dystopian novels, it becomes symbolic of human societies silently doing business to mask their problems. In contrast, God re-clothes humans later to indicate that whatever technologies humans make, it will never reestablish the relationship they once had.

Self-Awareness and Vulnerability

The loincloths are the first man-made product of society outside of God, and they become fashion oriented to keep their vulnerability hidden. Community as a mirror for self-awareness becomes rare when everyone hides their vulnerability under wealth and fashion. In other words, without genuine openness to each other, people cannot learn about themselves from communal reflections or conversations. The consequence as seen in the previous chapter is the inability to truly love another person as Jonas and Katniss

profess. Loincloths hide their emotions, their individual depth, so that deep relationships are impossible. They stop taking emotional risks and become like the serpent, crafty, and looking for ways to survive in a life without God.

Complexity

Moreover, “loincloths” are technologies to simplify life. Yet, the transition into Genesis 3:7 is a move from simplicity to complexity: depth of life. “The opposite of freedom is not determinism, but hardness of heart. Freedom presupposes openness of heart, of mind, of eye and ear.”¹⁰ As quoted, the dystopian societies fear complexity, and develop tools to simplify people in order to facilitate the management of the status quo. Humans trade freedom for “hardness of heart” to avoid suffering, war, conflict, etc. That is like asking nature to grow without change, to ask volcanos to stop erupting because God has stopped creating mountains. All of the novels shun complexity and cannot handle the unknown, so they manage and control reality.

The loincloths are tools to simplify people (i.e. individualism to control people). I will locate the loincloths in the novels: *Divergent* simplifies people through virtue clans; *The Giver* simplifies temporal perspective through the eradication of memories; *Feed* simplifies through addiction and consumerism with an implanted internet in a person’s limbic system; *The Hunger Games* uses districts to simplify people. Individualism is making one’s own clothes, which translates into black and white thinking (which is the case for Jonas, who can only literally see black and white). This can feel like survival mode, simplifying life to hide the complexity and greyness.

¹⁰ Heschel, *The Prophets*: 191, Volume 1.

Loincloths eliminate risk. English Professor Matt Bratt in an interview for St. Thomas University makes a comment on a reoccurring theme in his writing: "...I would say the fear of/attraction to commitment to huge responsibilities and/or challenges. It seems to me we live in a relatively low-stakes world where can pretty readily make a life out of not really striving for anything."¹¹ His comment resonates with Abraham Heschel's words sixty years earlier: "Little does contemporary religion ask of man. It is ready to offer comfort; it has no courage to challenge...Its acceptance involves neither risk nor strain."¹² The complexity of life is numbed in wealth, leisure, and acceptance of the status quo.

Complexity is also a consequence of adulthood. Since the novels are for Young Adults (YA), loincloths cover the complexity of adulthood, and avoid the greyness of life. I capture this adulthood interpretation when God ironically reflects that humans are like Gods knowing good and evil (Gen 3:22). It is like the child who wears her dad's coat, stumbling around, causing a humorous scene. The dystopian novels correlate to the time when teenagers either obey or disobey adults, while at the same time trying to be independent. However, Adam and Eve became individuals, trying to transition into good and evil (i.e. complexity) without help. They should have trusted God, because God knows how to handle the tree's fruit.

The loincloths as simplicity also mean conflict avoidance. The scope of life from hunger to satisfaction is lost in the avoidance of conflict. It is painful to have disputes, but is even more painful to just get along as Amity does in *Divergent* or to avoid the silence

¹¹ Matt Batt, "Q & A with Matt Batt," *University of St. Thomas*, Sept. 18, 2012 2013.

¹² Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The insecurity of freedom; essays on human existence* (New York,: Farrar, 1966). 3.

of space like Titus in *Feed*; it is painful to avoid the unknown of adulthood. Had Adam and Eve waited, would have God eventually opened the forbidden tree to them? What we do know is that teenagers are experiencing a greater pain resisting adulthood than jumping into it (hence, the motif in *Divergent* of heights and jumping from them). In the case of the novels, the characters transition to immature worlds, this is not any fault of the teens.

That does not mean they do it alone, but often teenagers create their own dystopian world. They try to return to the Garden of Eden with the simplified understanding of life. The transition is less painful under the help of multiple perspectives from others. Also embracing the pain is growth, “When hardness is complete, it becomes despair, the end of conceit.”¹³ Teenagers need to remove the clothes, burn them, and take on the garments from God. There needs to be consciousness-raising again because the societies have a hard heart, and “Hardness of the heart is a condition of which the afflicted is unaware.”¹⁴

A possible alternative to making a loincloth would have been to say “I don’t know”. Tris the protagonist of *Divergent* admits ignorance on a few occasions. “Not every Abnegation family is religious, but my father says we should try not to see those differences because they will only divide us. I am not sure what to make of that.”¹⁵

The loincloth has a temporal aspect, indicating lost hope. The societies disconnect from the past and future in order to simplify reality. Thereby, the power holder gains

¹³ Heschel, *The Prophets*: 192 volume 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 191 volume 1.

¹⁵ Roth, *Divergent*. 32.

control over memories and hope. “The dream of returning to, or of creating, a simpler, purer time recurs over and over in popular culture.”¹⁶ In a genuine relationship, there are memories and hope. The highly regulated societies shun chaos or an open system of possibility. Hope means the present situation can change, to transcend the current status quo. The dystopian societies prevent relationships to eradicate memories and hope. Yet, the hunger is there for deeper relationship.

Genesis 3:8

Adam and Eve create a second level of separation from God: “They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.” There are two levels of hiding: first the loincloths and then actively hiding themselves in the trees. The trees in which they hid have been suggested to be a symbol for community.¹⁷ They have hid in human community, one that is very different from God’s community. That is, God went missing.

God is Present

The issue of community has its roots in psychology, and because of individualism, God has lost. The novels depict worlds in transition from middle adolescence to late adolescence. Around age seventeen until the 20s, the average teenager is in stage of adolescence, in which they struggle with “mutuality and intimacy” or “Who

¹⁶ Theresa Sanders, *Approaching Eden: Adam and Eve in popular culture* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2009). 156.

¹⁷ T. Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden: Genesis 2-3 and symbolism of the Eden garden in biblical Hebrew literature*, Contributions to biblical exegesis and theology (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2000). 93.

am I in relation to others?”¹⁸ In the previous stage, teenagers struggled with autonomy: “While identity and individuation seem to be the key developmental issues of early adolescence, it is autonomy that now becomes paramount.” If autonomy was the previous issue, the two issues of autonomy and community are in high tension. If the larger culture emphasizes autonomy, then dystopian individualism exasperates the tension of autonomy and community, often eliminating community.

Humans lose God when destroying their connection to the earth. The two Hebrew words for Adam and ground indicate a larger community: “God’s breath animates the dust and it becomes a single living being.”¹⁹ When the first community decides to hide in the garden, it seems ridiculous based on the relationship of the ground to them. They were created to “till it and keep it” (Cf. Gen 2:5; 21:5). “The whole natural world around us lives symbiotically with and from and in one another, for life on earth means community in communication.”²⁰

Adam and Eve hide among the trees of the garden so that the voice of God had no space to enter into their human community. The actual meaning of the Hebrew word for sound is not fully understood among scholars.²¹ In the Old Testament, God is speaking all of the time, but God’s sound in the garden is not fully understood in terms of the referential object. Thus, the ambiguity is a door for interpretation. Even though God is

¹⁸ Fernando Arzola, *Toward a prophetic youth ministry: theory and praxis in urban context* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2008). 107.

¹⁹ Michael David Coogan et al., *The new Oxford annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books: New Revised Standard Version*, Augm. 3rd ed. (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). 13 Hebrew bible.

²⁰ Moltmann, "Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology."

²¹ Merrill Frederick Unger and William White, *Nelson's expository dictionary of the Old Testament* (Nashville, Tenn: T. Nelson, 1980). 454.

“walking”, it is not human. “...Gen. 3:8.10 may engage in anti-anthropomorphism in that it is not Yaweh who moves about in the garden, but his *qol*.” Moreover, God’s sound is not an acoustic perception, natural sound, animal, utensil, instrument, human, or voice. It is not thunder (PS: 29); it is not in the context of chastisement, because God does not know they have sinned yet (Isa. 30:30-31); God is not addressing Adam and Eve yet, so it is not discourse or an articulated voice, it not the voice of proclamation (Dt. 4:12-13). It is not translated as the voice of God, and it is not the sound of walking. It is simply the undefinable sound of God.²²

For me, this sound is the feeling Titus describes while in space that creates a sort of anxiety that causes everyone to talk louder. “The thing I hate about space is that you can feel how old and empty it is. I don’t know if the others felt like I felt, about space? But I think they did, because they all got louder.”²³ This is the fear of becoming factionless in *Divergent* and released in *The Giver*. Yet, clinging to each other is not enough to satisfy the physical connectedness humans need with God.

God is not calling them into question. God wants humans to turn back, but humans hide: “This concept [hid] undoubtedly involves not only the element of motion in escape, but also the element of being no longer perceptible to the senses.”²⁴ Humans are numbing their senses to hide from God. If it is hard to say what the sound of God refers to, then it is possible Adam and Eve were escaping the totality of God. Since it is ridiculous to hide from God, they numb themselves, talk louder, etc.

²² Botterweck and Ringgren, *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament*: 581, VII.

²³ Anderson, *Feed*: 4.

²⁴ Botterweck and Ringgren, *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament*: 166, IV.

Where has the sound of the Lord God gone? The question is wrong; rather, where have we gone? When humans move too far into individualism, they lose the ability to transcend themselves through community. “That I can’t explain how things are with Gale because I don’t know myself... That if I do have feelings for him, it doesn’t matter because I’ll never be able to afford the kind of love that leads to a family, to children.”²⁵ The transcendent has disappeared. *1984* has demonstrated the abuse of myth to remove the transcendent, and myth for the sake of power becomes a powerless myth.²⁶ Thus, the myth of individualism needs to surrender to God. A myth that does not liberate is oppression. God and liberation are needed together.

The presence of God is missing in the dystopian novels. Since the enlightenment era when Kant posited God remains apart from creation, there is a moral imperative to believe in God or else there would be chaos. In reality, chaos is the problem at the end of each dystopian novel, because humans ignore God. God went nowhere, but Adam and Eve hide among the trees from God. I would think Adam and Eve knew more about God’s immanence, but they seem to know less. This displays their ignorance of the fact that God knows creation better than anyone in the world. Assuming Adam and Eve knew God made the Garden, it is absurd to think they had found an unknown spot in the garden to hide. Instead of knowing more, they act as if God left creation. Perhaps they are playing dumb like Katniss.

“What’s an Avox?” I ask stupidly.

²⁵ Collins, *The Hunger Games*. 373.

²⁶ Pavol Bargár, "Mythical motifs in literary works: M. Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* and G. Orwell's *1984*," *Communio viatorum* 51, no. 1 (2009): 85.

“Someone who committed a crime. They cut her tongue so she can’t speak,” says Haymitch. “She’s probably a traitor of some sort. Not likely you’d know her.”²⁷

Katniss acts stupid to protect herself, and thereby rendering herself silent, too. Adam and Eve, unlike Katniss, cannot play dumb about their silence. In response to the issue of individualism, communication has been proposed as a solution to hiding in the woods and wearing loincloths.

Genesis 3:9

Genesis 3:9 suggest the answer is communication through the question that calls humans into community, “where are you?” Unlike the totalitarian societies, God creates community through an invitation.

Invitation

God invites people into community through awareness and connectedness. The question is a call to repentance (cf. Acts 9:4-9) and connectedness (cf. John 17:21-24). God does not enforce or coerce. The question is not an imperative. It’s a question to reorient them to community.

Based on the novels, humans need communication with God: “The public sharing of pain is one way to let the reality sink in and let the death go.”²⁸ Otherwise, humans become like Katniss who is sent on a public tour to promote the Hunger Games in *Catching Fire*. She becomes co-opted, condoning the reality of human sin. If they do not

²⁷ Collins, *The Hunger Games*. 77.

²⁸ Brueggemann, *The prophetic imagination*: 117.

challenge the reality with communication, they become Adam, who silently affirmed Eve's decision to eat.

The issue of non-communicative individualism can be traced back to Plato. World Christianity theologian Paul Chung argues to correct the individualism by "...connecting the spiritual life with the socially embodied life."²⁹ That is, the transcendent is missing in the dystopian societies, or the voice of God.

Each novel ends with the realization that humans should neither live with man-made clothing nor hide in the trees. The protagonists are able to make change through communication. For example, *Divergent* has Tris dialoging with her trainer, Four, in private about the problems with the faction system. This dialogue helps her grow in awareness and closeness to Four. Together they process the reality under which they are oppressed. In *The Giver*, Jonas honestly processes the society with the Receiver. *Feed* has Violet and Titus processing reality together until the end where Violet's death brings Titus to full awareness. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss is able to honestly talk about life with Gale in the illegal woods.

The Garden of Eden is a contained area like a monastery. Nevertheless, community is culturally bound. I cannot suggest concrete examples or universal attributes of God's community because of the changing context for each person. Thus, due to the critique of dystopian novels, I will suggest Genesis 3 as a starting point to remove loin cloths and to return to the sound of God. "Confession is essential because liberation from sin and reconciliation with others is not possible if one does not realize one is

²⁹ Paul S. Chung, *The Cave and the Butterfly: an intercultural theory of interpretation and religion in the public sphere* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011). 275.

caught in sin and alienated from others.”³⁰ If we are to forgive each other, there needs to be confession and repentance. The conversion is possible when we realize there has been sin. There are examples of how the church has accomplished this in the past, such as the office of the keys, “a means of challenging worshipers through repentance and renewal...keeps Christians in a living relationship with the Lord, protecting them from the illusion of a false security.”³¹

Whether the church needs reformation, or theology, or whatever—I conclude that the next step after responding to God’s question, “where are you,” is communication. “How can human persons defend their dignity and freedom over against the pressure of modern individualism? By becoming able and willing for community, and by defending their communal life.”³² Moltmann defines community as communication.³³ Also, World Christianity professor Paul Chung argues for a critical theory of communication in response to modern individualism.³⁴

We have manufactured clothes; we have heard the voice; and, we have hid. Individualism stands before a patient God, inviting broken societies into community with God’s question of grace and love “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9).

³⁰ Daniel M. Bell, *Liberation theology after the end of history: the refusal to cease suffering*, Radical orthodoxy series (New York: Routledge, 2001). 174.

³¹ Walter Sundberg, *Worship as repentance: Lutheran liturgical traditions and Catholic consensus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012). 79.

³² Moltmann, “Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology,” 124.

³³ *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁴ Chung, *The Cave and the Butterfly: an intercultural theory of interpretation and religion in the public sphere*: 275.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

This paper engaged popular young adult dystopian literature with the societal empowerment approach to narrative pedagogy. I think the popularity suggests religious leaders could learn important issues pertinent to young adults and teenagers; hence, the titles *Feed* and *The Hunger Games*—young adults are hungry for more than what society feeds them. I argued individualism is the key issue, which means society prevents any form of communication; and I sought out an answer in Genesis 3:7-9. Since the falling apart of societies or communities is inversely related to individualism as silence, God restores communities with communication.

In summary, Chapter 1 proposed the governments created two threats in order to keep citizens obedient to the status quo. First, dystopian societies have an external threat: *Divergent* claims war; *The Giver* claims pain; and *Feed* claims emptiness. *The Hunger Games* is different, because the districts want society to change. These threats poison the idea of conflict, claiming that all conflict is unhealthy. The point of the threat is to create a desire for security in silence. Therefore, it maintains the status quo, which benefits the power holders.

Second, the internal threat is exile, exploiting the need to belong. The government monopolizes the only source of community: *Divergent* threatens factionless; *The Giver* threatens release; *Feed* threatens loneliness; and *The Hunger Games* threatens every form of violence.

Overall, the internal and external threats are tools of dystopian societies to create silent individuals to maintain the status quo. The internal and external threats harm communication in six areas: creates a competitive environment, diminishes language, breaks down love and family, causes black and white thinking, restricts leisure, and inhibits reflective self-aware thinking.

Katniss, Jonas, Tris, Violet, and Titus in the midst of suffering find moments of genuine community when they dialogue with one another. In contrast to the dystopian societies, the attributes of God's community have been suggested by liberation theology: comradely, prophetic, committed, free, joyful, contemplative, and utopian.¹ I hope to have continued that conversation, reflecting upon individualism in relation to Genesis 3:7-9.

Genesis 3:7 portrays humans removing the attributes of Gods' community with loincloths: they removed cooperation, communication, love, openness to complexity, true freedom, abundance, and self-awareness. Genesis 3:8 portrays humans eliminating God. In other words, the sound of Lord God is here, and God is open to dialogue to define God's community for the discerning Christian. However, humans run away to hide out of fear. With the question in Genesis 3:9 "Where are you?" God has an invitation to become fully human and fully communal. Instead of turning inwards like humans, God turns outwards with grace and invitation to re-orientate humans to community through communication.

¹ Boff and Boff, *Introducing liberation theology*: 93-95.

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